

**Alexander McRae's
Liberty Jail Experiences
Letter to the Editor**

In 1854, Alexander McRae wrote several letters to the Deseret News newspaper describing what life had been like in the Liberty, Missouri Jail during his imprisonment with Joseph Smith and others from December 1, 1838 until April 6, 1839. In this letter he writes about cruelties they endured and how trusting in Joseph saved them.

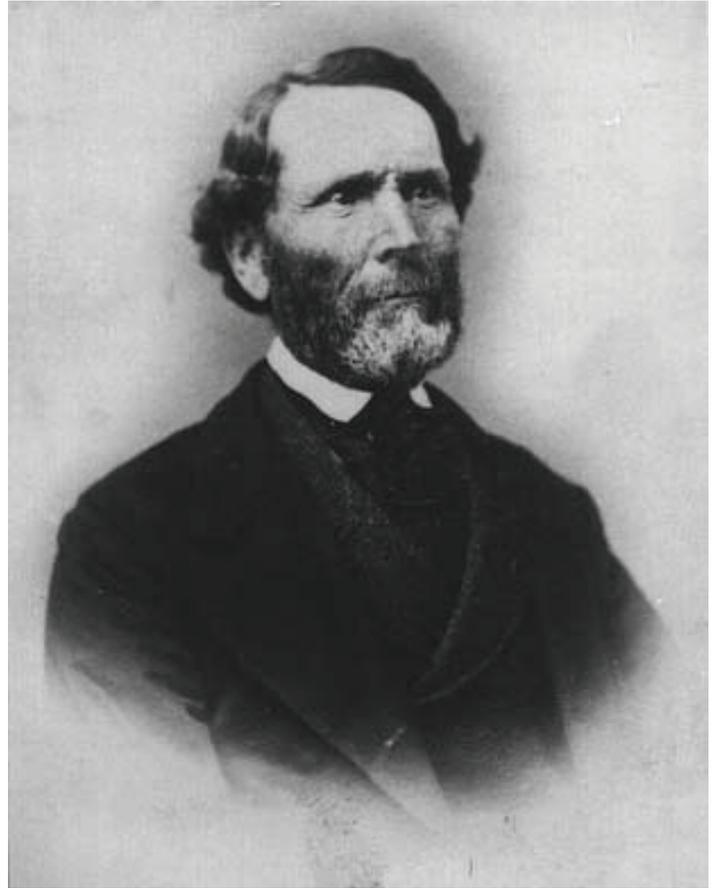
Mr. Editor: Sometime during our stay in Liberty jail an attempt was made to destroy us by poison. I supposed it was administered in either tea or coffee, but as I did not use either, I escaped unhurt, while all who did were sorely afflicted, some being blind two or three days, and it was only by much faith and prayer that the effect was overcome.

We never suffered ourselves to go into any important measure without asking Brother Joseph to inquire of the Lord in relation to it. Such was our confidence in him as a Prophet, that when he said "Thus saith the Lord," we were confident it would be as he said; and the more we tried it, the more confidence we had, for we never found his word fail in a single instance.

A short time before we were to go to Davies county for trial, word came to us that either General Atchison or Doniphan, would raise a military force, and go with us to protect us from the wrath of that people. The matter was discussed by the brethren (except Brother Joseph), and they naturally enough concluded it would be best; and although I had nothing to say, I concurred with them in my feelings. Brother Hyrum asked Brother Joseph what he thought of it. Brother Joseph hung his head a few moments, and seemed in a deep study, and then raised up and said, "Brother Hyrum, it will not do; we must trust in the Lord; if we take a guard with us we shall be destroyed."

This was very unexpected to us, but Brother Hyrum remarked, "If you say it in the name of the Lord, we will rely on it." Said Brother Joseph, "In the name of the Lord, if we take a guard with us, we will be destroyed; but if we put our trust in the Lord, we shall be safe, and no harm shall befall us, and we shall be better treated than we have ever been since we have been prisoners."

This settled the question, and all seemed satisfied, and it was decided that we should have no extra guard,



Alexander McRae

and they had only such a guard as they chose for our safe keeping. When we arrived at the place where the court was held, I began to think he was mistaken for once, for the people rushed upon us en masse, crying, "Kill the: --- --- them, kill them." I could see no chance for escape, unless we could fight our way through, and we had nothing to do it with. At this, Brother Joseph, at whom all seemed to rush, rose up and said, "We are in your hands; if we are guilty, we refuse not to be punished by the law." Hearing these words, two of the most bitter mobocrats in the country--one by the name of William Peniston and the other Kinney, or McKinney, I do not remember which--got up on benches and began to speak to the people, saying, "Yes, gentlemen, these men are in our hands; let us not use violence, but let the law have its course; the law will condemn them, and they will be punished by it. We do not want the disgrace of taking the law into our own hands."

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The Clay County Jail, often called the Liberty Jail was built in 1833 for a cost of \$600. It was only used for 23 years as a jail until 1856, at which time it was deemed unsafe. Porter Rockwell was also incarcerated at the Liberty Jail for about 10 days while awaiting attempted murder charges of Governor Boggs.

Alexander McRae plus Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Lyman Wight and Caleb Baldwin were incarcerated in the Liberty Jail on charges of treason against the State of Missouri. McRae had served as a Captain with the Caldwell County Militia.

Upon his surrender at Far West, Captain McRae drew his sword, flailed it in the air and then drove it deep into the ground stating, "You have got my arms, you have not got my spunk."

It was that spunk plus his unwaivering faith and determination that landed McRae in the Liberty Jail.

All the prisoners were released from custody, April 16, 1839. They relocated with their families April 22, 1839, at Quincey, Illinois.

In a very few minutes they were quieted, and they seemed now as friendly as they had a few minutes before been enraged. Liquor was procured, and we all had to drink in token of friendship. This took place in the court-room (a small log cabin about twelve feet square), during the adjournment of the court; and from that time until we got away, they could not put a guard over us who would not become so friendly that they dare not

trust them, and the guard was very frequently changed. We were seated at the first table with the judge, lawyers, etc., and had the best the country afforded, with feather beds to sleep on--a privilege we had not before enjoyed in all our imprisonment.

On one occasion, while we were there, the above-named William Peniston, partly in joke and partly in earnest, threw out a rather hard insinuation against some of the brethren. This touched Joseph's feelings, and he retorted a good deal in the same way, only with such power that the earth seemed to tremble under this feat, and said, "Your heart is as black as your whiskers," which were as black as any crow. He seemed to quake under it and left the room.

The guards, who had become friendly, were alarmed for our safety, and exclaimed, "O, Mr. Smith, do not talk so; you will bring trouble upon yourself and companions." Brother Joseph replied, "Do not be alarmed; I know what I am about." He always took up for the brethren, when their characters were assailed, sooner than for himself, no matter how unpopular it was to speak in their favor.

Yours as ever,
Alexander McRae

Source:

Second Letter of Alexander McRae to the Deseret News, Salt Lake City, Utah, Nov. 1. 1854

